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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [BO](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: LUKASHENKA MEETS POPE IN ROME

REF: 08 VATICAN 52

CLASSIFIED BY: Rafael Foley, A/DCM.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (U) President Lukashenka of Belarus met the Pope on Monday, April 27. Lukashenka had requested the meeting. Other than confirming the meeting took place, the Holy See has not issued yet any other information about it.

[1](#)2. (C) In anticipation of the Papal private audience, ADCM reached out to the Vatican's Secretariat of State point person for Belarus, Monsignor Julio Murat, to underline the importance the U.S. attaches to respect for human rights and democracy in Belarus. Murat said the Holy See shares these concerns, and promised to relay them to his superiors. He confirmed that human rights would be on the Pope's agenda with Lukashenka. Separately, an Eastern European diplomat told ADCM that the Vatican had consulted with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kyrill before accepting Lukashenka's request, and that Kyrill raised no objections.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment: It is common for heads of state coming to Rome to request private audiences with the Pope. The Vatican will accommodate all such requests, if the Pope's busy schedule permits. However, as is the case with other former Soviet republics with Christian Orthodox majorities, the Holy See is careful not to offend the Russian Orthodox hierarchy when dealing with Belarus, which explains why it consulted with Kyrill. In the past (reftel), Vatican officials have been cautiously optimistic about the prospects for greater religious freedom in Belarus, even if the law discriminates against small protestant denominations. Murat has promised a more detailed readout later this week of Lukashenka's meeting. Post will report on this discussion separately. End comment.

NOYES